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The Five Points of Calvinism Considered

By David Servant

1. Total Depravity and Irresistible Grace

Let us first consider points one and four of Calvinism's TULIP: *Total Depravity* and *Irresistible Grace*. Without a doubt they are intrinsically linked, and thus it is almost impossible to consider one without mentioning the other. (Moreover, the other three points are built upon these pillars, and if these fall, the others must follow.)

All Christians rightly maintain that humanity is sinful by nature, born with a propensity to sin. This fact is easily proved from Scripture (not to mention human experience). In Romans 3:9-12, for example, Paul records a sampling of God's assessment of sinful humanity as found in various Psalms: "There is none righteous, not even one...there is none who seeks for God...there is none who does good." Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1, 3 that we were "dead in [our] trespasses and sins...by nature children of wrath." Unregenerate people are "slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:6) and are "held captive" by Satan "to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:26).

Clearly, the Bible affirms that, in general, humanity is very corrupt and sinful. In fact, unless God did something to get our attention and draw us to Him, we would never turn from our sins. Moreover, no person can escape his slavery to sin apart from God's gracious help. We thus affirm man's depravity, God's prevenient grace (i.e., a grace shown by God that precedes regeneration) and His enabling grace that empowers us to live holy lives once we are born again.

Calvinists, however, go further than that when they speak of man's depravity and God's grace. They believe that unregenerate people are so corrupt that it is actually *impossible* for them to submit to God or believe in Jesus; thus they are *totally* depraved. Moreover, unless God sovereignly changes their wills by a grace that is *irresistible*, they will *never* submit to God or repent. Even though people might *think* they have the choice to repent, they are making a wrong assumption according to the Calvinist. If they *don't* repent, they are actually doing the only thing they can do, because God didn't grant to them His irresistible grace. If they do repent, they are actually doing what would be impossible for them *not* to do, because God is sovereignly influencing and changing them by a grace that is irresistible. *Thus, they are making no choice at all in the matter of salvation.* Rather, God is choosing them and making them into believers. He is changing

their wills, because totally depraved people, according to the Calvinist, would never, and could never, humble themselves or choose to repent.

Interestingly, however, many Calvinists maintain that unregenerate people *do* possess free wills to some degree. John Piper states,

There is no doubt that man *could* perform more evil acts toward his fellow man than he does. But if he is restrained from performing more evil acts by motives that are not owing to his glad submission to God, then even his “virtue” is evil in the sight of God (p. 5, prgh 2, emphasis added).

If unregenerate man *could* perform more evil acts toward his fellow man but *doesn't* because he is *restrained* by some wrong inward motive (thus the man is restrained by *himself*, and not some outside force), then unregenerate man is making a moral decision by his own free will. Piper also states, “Except for the continual exertion of saving grace, we will always *use our freedom* to resist God” (p. 9, prgh. 6, emphasis added). Note again the affirmation of the free will of regenerate and unregenerate man (“use our freedom”), but Piper believes that unregenerate man will always use his freedom to resist God, because he is totally depraved.

If this is so, then it is not too strong of a statement to say that Calvinists believe that God causes people to believe in Christ and be born again *against their wills*, because they would never and could never have chosen to believe and be born again otherwise. Given the choice, they would have preferred to stay in sin, not repent or believe, and never be born again. Just before God bestowed His “irresistible grace” upon them, had you asked them if they wanted to repent and follow Jesus, they would not have answered in the affirmative. But, moments later, God forces them into doing what they would have resisted moments earlier, would never have wanted, and could not have done. Thus, every person whom God causes to be born again, He causes them to be born again against their wills, and that is what Calvinists believe even if they say they don't.

Piper explains that some influence by the Holy Spirit *can* be resisted, but that “the Holy Spirit can overcome all resistance and make His influence irresistible” (p. 9, prgh. 1). Thus, God can send two kinds of influence: that which is resistible and that which is irresistible, whichever kind He wills. Piper further elaborates on this as he explains how God can sovereignly give someone the ability to repent, which, according to Piper, is another way of describing how God sends His irresistible grace upon a person:

When a person hears a preacher call for repentance he can resist that call. But if God gives him repentance he cannot resist because the gift is the removal of the resistance. Not being willing to repent is the same as resisting the Holy Spirit. So if God gives repentance it is the same as taking away the resistance. This is why we call this work of God “irresistible grace” (p. 10, prgh. 6).

Directly after this explanation, Piper declares: “Note: It should be obvious from this that irresistible grace *never implies that God forces us to believe against our will*. That would even be a contradiction in terms” (p. 10, prgh. 7, emphasis added).

I must ask, how could irresistible grace work on a totally depraved person so as not to be forcing him to believe against his will? If the unregenerate person is initially able to

resist God's grace as he hears the gospel preached, then God must at that time be sending him a grace that is resistible. The totally depraved man, according to Piper, will always continue to resist God's grace as long as it is of the "resistible" type. But as soon as God bestows some "irresistible grace" the man *immediately* can no longer resist (because the grace is *irresistible*, which means it can't be resisted for even a second), and so he is *immediately* born again and believes. But just a moment ago, he was resisting! How can Piper then say that "it should be obvious from this that irresistible grace never implies that God forces us to believe against our will"? Not only is that *not* obvious, it stands in direct contradiction to what Piper has just said!

Piper's logic becomes even more convoluted as he continues: "On the contrary, irresistible grace is compatible with preaching and witnessing that tries to persuade people to do what is reasonable and what will accord with their best interests" (p. 10, prgh. 7). Piper apparently realizes that the concept of irresistible grace raises an immense problem regarding the necessity of persuasive preaching, a problem he hopes to avoid with a one-sentence disclaimer that only exposes his problem. Piper's concept of irresistible grace is clearly *not* compatible with persuasive preaching.

Here is my question to the Calvinist: Why *must* we preach the gospel in order for people to be saved? If man plays no part at all in his conversion, why *must* he hear the gospel to be saved, as Paul says he must in Romans 10:14? A consistently logical Calvinist could never say that persuasive preaching *influences* the unregenerate person to yield to God, because the unregenerate person will always use his freedom to resist God (Piper, p. 9, prgh. 6). Thus the *only* way an unregenerate person becomes regenerate is if God sovereignly bestows upon him His irresistible grace. So all the persuasive preaching in the world won't make a bit of difference in the saving of anyone. In fact, to even *attempt* to persuade someone is an attack on God's supposed sovereign grace in salvation, because to do so implies that salvation rests, in part, on the hearer and also rests, in part, on the preacher.

According to the Calvinist who is consistent, our preaching *cannot* have any persuasive power over one who is totally depraved, and if it does, then we must admit that unregenerate man can do something (be persuaded) that leads to his salvation.

If man has nothing to do with his repentance because the ability to repent is God's gift, then why did Paul so often *reason* with the Jews from the Scriptures to *prove* that Jesus was the Messiah (e.g., see Acts 17:2-4)? Why did he attempt to "persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11) and *beg* people to be "reconciled to God"? (2 Cor. 5:20). Why do we read in Acts 28:24 (as Paul reasoned with the Jews about Jesus), "And some were being *persuaded* by the things spoken, but others *would not believe*" (emphasis added)? Why did Paul write, "I have become all things to all men, *that I may* by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22, emphasis added)? Why did he write that the Jews hindered him from "speaking to the Gentiles *that they might be saved*" (1 Thes. 2:16, emphasis added)?

Clearly, Paul believed that what he said and did affected the results of his evangelism, because people's wills played a part in their salvation. Again, a preacher's *attempt* to persuade an unregenerate man would be an admission that man plays a part in his repentance, and it would be an affront to God's sovereignty—if no man can be saved apart from God's irresistible grace. In fact, to try to persuade an unregenerate person to yield to Christ is to mislead him into thinking that he is not so totally depraved after all, because he can choose to repent!

To a Calvinist who remains consistent with his theology, *persuasive preaching is ineffectual and useless*, and the Calvinist can draw no other conclusion, lest he be guilty of believing that salvation is not completely the sovereign work of God. There is no escape from this: If people must hear preaching in order to be saved, then people (and preachers) play a part in their salvation, because preaching persuades them to do something, and thus they must have free wills that can choose to repent. This is just one more proof that salvation is not solely the work of God. Man must play a part, otherwise there would be no need for preaching.

Calvinists attempt to answer this particular objection by saying that preaching the gospel is simply a *means* God uses in saving people. I must ask then, "Is it a meaningless means or a meaningful means?" If it is a meaningless means, then why do you call it a *means*? If something is a means to something else, then it serves a purpose to a certain end. There is no such thing as a meaningless means.

If it is a meaningful means, then it serves some purpose that needs to be served to reach the desired ends. According to Scripture, preaching the gospel is an *essential* means (see Rom. 10:14), because by it God's message is communicated to people who, if they are to be saved, must believe God's message and repent. Thus, people's salvation is dependent on preachers preaching and hearers responding.

If salvation is supposedly a sovereign act of God who bestows on some people His irresistible grace, why don't Calvinists simply stand in front of unregenerate audiences and recite nursery rhymes? Then they could prove the truth of their doctrine of irresistible grace as people are sovereignly born again. Yet I notice that Calvinists try to appeal to the minds and hearts of their hearers in order to *persuade* them to repent and believe, something their audiences, by definition, *can't do* unless God sovereignly regenerates them. The preaching of Calvinists contradicts what they say they believe.

There are many biblical examples of the *effects* of persuasive preaching that could be cited. For example, Acts 17:11-12 tells us:

Now these [Berean Jews] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. Many of them *therefore believed* [note that *they* believed because *they* were noble-minded and thus searched the Scriptures daily] along with a number of prominent Greek women and men (emphasis added).

Their receptivity had something to do with their salvation, as Jesus plainly taught in the Parable of the Sower and the Soils (see Mark 4:1-20).

If Calvinists are consistent with their theology, what is the gospel that they should proclaim? Should they deceive their audiences, calling on them to repent and believe in Christ, misleading them into thinking that they *can do something* in regards to their salvation, thus strengthening their listener's pride and increasing their spiritual darkness? Or do they tell them the "truth" that they are so depraved that they are incapable of submitting to God, and unless God shows them His irresistible grace, they can never be saved? How does "faith come from hearing" (Rom. 10:17) that?

Obviously, such a "gospel" leaves nothing for the hearer to cling to in faith. That is why Calvinists keep their unique doctrines secret from the unregenerate, only to reveal them at a later time to Christians when they are ready to receive the "truth." Truly, the

five points of Calvinism are the “family secret.” Even though they are supposedly the foundational truths of salvation, they dare not be revealed to the unsaved. This, by itself, shows the fallacy of Calvinism. Calvinists intuitively know that if they tell unregenerate people the “truth,” they will have no converts. So they preach a deceptive Arminian gospel, hope for a response, and later let their converts know “what really happened.”

Calvinistic Converts

I can't help but wonder how God takes pleasure in people who are, against their wills, supposedly regenerated by God's irresistible grace. They are really nothing more than robots. If they love Him, it is only because they had no choice but to love Him, because they would have preferred to continue hating Him. This means, of course, that they really *don't* love Him, because love is predicated upon choice. Their warm feelings toward Him are pre-programmed; thus true love is impossible. I encourage the reader to take a puppet made from a sock, put it on his hand, have it turn and look at him, and then have it say, “I love you!” Does that give the reader the same feeling as when his spouse or child says those words? And why not? Because free will has been eliminated. The puppet is only saying what you are making him say.

I also can't help but wonder about the validity of Piper's belief that unregenerate man will always use his freedom to resist God. Imagine a man who is an adulterer. His God-given conscience condemns him continually (see Rom. 2:15), but he continues in his adulterous relationship. Thus he is using his freedom to resist God, which Piper says is all he can or will ever do since he is totally depraved. But imagine that he finally breaks off his adulterous relationship due to guilt. Now can it still be said that he has only used his freedom to resist God? No, it cannot. He used his freedom to repent of adultery, and yielded to his God-given conscience. If he can use his freedom to do that, why can't he, with the help of the Holy Spirit, repent of a lifestyle of rebellion and humble himself before God?

How could someone who has the free choice to remain *unrepentant* possibly *not* have the freedom to choose *to* repent? How could a person have the capacity to choose to become more evil but not have the capacity to choose to become less evil? Merely by choosing to not become more evil is by default, a choice for good. If we can use our freedom to resist God but can't use it to yield to God, we really have no freedom at all. We're robots, programmed to do evil, having no freedom. It is utterly impossible to have *freedom* to resist God if one doesn't have *freedom* to yield to God. Calvin himself certainly admitted this fact, writing in his *Institutes*,

“Nothing is more absurd than to think anything at all is done but by the ordination of God....Every action and motion of every creature is so governed by the hidden counsel of God, that nothing can come to pass, but what was ordained by Him....The wills of men are so governed by the will of God, that they are carried on straight to the mark which He has fore-ordained” (*Cal. Inst.*, book 1, chapter 16, sect. 3).

At least Calvin was consistent in this respect. He admitted (unlike some modern Calvinists) that there really was no room for free will in this theology. If depraved man can do nothing other than sin, then he has as much free will as a bullet shot from a gun.

Calvinists clearly add to what Scripture states regarding humanity's depravity and God's grace. Although unregenerate people are indeed, "dead in [their] trespasses and sins," *hundreds* (if not *thousands*) of scriptures clearly state or imply that spiritually dead people can choose to humble themselves and repent, especially while they are under the influence of the gracious drawing of God's Spirit. God's drawing, however, never forces anyone to repent, nor does it change anyone's will apart from the consent of his heart.

Although Scripture repeatedly decries the sinful state of humanity, at the same time it calls on *all* people to repent; thus it is obvious that *all* spiritually dead people still have the capacity to repent. For example, Paul publicly proclaimed, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that *all everywhere* should repent" (Acts 17:30, emphasis added). If Paul believed that people were so depraved that they had no capacity to repent, he would not have said that God was calling *all people everywhere* to repent, unless he was a deceiver. Moreover, if it were impossible for spiritually dead people to repent, God would be unrighteous to expect *all* of them to do what they are incapable of doing and then hold them guilty for not doing it.

Like Paul, John the Baptist, Jesus, and all the other apostles preached the gospel, calling on *all* people to repent (see Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 11:20; Mark 6:12; Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 11:18; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Several times in the book of Revelation, John is amazed that unregenerate people don't repent while suffering God's judgments (see Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9, 11). Jesus pronounced woe upon all the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida because they didn't repent, obviously indicating He believed they had the capacity to repent (see Matt. 11:21). He also declared that the wicked people of Tyre and Sidon, who didn't repent, *would* have repented if they had seen miracles like the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida had seen! In both cases, Jesus believed that those who *didn't* repent had the capacity *to* repent and *should* have repented, in contrast to Calvinists, who believe unregenerate people have no capacity to repent outside of God changing their wills and forcing them to repent (which He only does for some). Thus, Calvinism portrays Jesus as a liar and a deceiver, because Jesus gave all indication that people could do what He knew full well they couldn't do. This also makes God the Father a liar, as Jesus only spoke His words (see John 12:49).

Jesus expected *everyone* of His generation to repent, because He stated that the men of Nineveh, who repented at Jonah's preaching, would rightfully condemn His generation for not repenting. Again, if they had no capacity to repent, He would not have condemned them, as that would make God unrighteous. Moreover, what right would the repentant people of Nineveh have to condemn Jesus' unrepentant generation? The people of Jesus' generation could rightly say, "How can you, who by God's sovereign decree could do nothing other than repent, condemn us, who by God's sovereign decree could do nothing other than remain unrepentant?"

Thus, the Calvinist, who believes God condemns people for not doing what they are incapable of doing, makes God grossly unjust. God is thus somewhat equivalent to the parent who spans his baby for not walking, but He is a million times worse. Why? Because to the Calvinist, God tortures people eternally in hell for not doing what they were absolutely *incapable* of doing.

The Calvinist also makes God ultimately responsible for all the evil in the world. Why? Because God could put an end to all evil by influencing everyone with His irresistible grace, but He sovereignly chooses not to, thus evil remains only because of

God's sovereign choice. Depraved man can supposedly do nothing but sin unless God keeps him from it by choosing to show him His irresistible grace, so the ultimate reason for evil is because God doesn't keep evil people from sinning.

Calvinists often decry the position of non-Calvinists, accusing them of making *man* responsible for his own *salvation* (which is a false accusation). Yet Calvinists make *God* responsible for the *damnation* of billions! Clearly, the God of Calvinism hates people even before they are born, when He determines that their eternal fate will be incarceration and agony in hell. If God is *solely* responsible for the salvation of certain people, He is also *solely* responsible for the damnation of everyone else, because only He could have rescued them from their fate, but He decided not to do so. And that decision was not predicated on God's *inability* to stop sin, but His *unwillingness* to stop it. Thus God wills sin in select people's lives. To the Calvinist, man doesn't stop sinning because he has no choice, but because God, who can stop sin, chooses not to! God is thus even more "totally depraved" than we are!

Calvinists should not object to this point, because Calvin himself believed that Adam fell, not because Adam chose by his own free will to sin, but because God ordained his fall:

God not only foresaw that Adam would fall, but also ordained that he should....I confess it is a horrible decree; yet no one can deny but God foreknew Adam's fall, and therefore foreknew it, because he had ordained it so by his own decree (*Cal. Inst.*, b. 3, c. 23, sec. 7).

The Calvinist also portrays God as a very confused God who is actually working against Himself, hating sin and evil, yet promoting the very thing He hates by creating people who have no capacity but to do evil and who are predestined to never change. Moreover, the Calvinist's God is a hypocrite, as He practices sins that He condemns in others, such as deception and showing partiality.

In summary, the Calvinist makes God a lying, deceiving, bigoted, malicious, unjust, confused hypocrite who is responsible for the world's evil and who creates people for the expressed purpose of torturing them forever. If any man did the things Calvinists say God does, every person on the earth would rightly consider that man worthy of immediate execution, and certainly not worthy to be worshiped. Who is really robbing God of glory? Is it the non-Calvinist who says that man must yield to God's Spirit using his God-given free will in order to be saved, or is it the Calvinist, who turns God into a monster?

Unlike the Calvinist who (whether he admits it or not) places the responsibility on *God* for people's lack of repentance, Jesus placed the blame on the unrepentant people themselves. He said as He wept over Jerusalem,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and *you were unwilling* (Matt. 23:37, emphasis added).

Notice that Jesus loved them all and wanted them all to repent, but they refused to yield to His love. The Calvinist, however, makes Jesus say, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her, proving that you are totally

depraved. I *never* wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, thus I chose not to grant you My irresistible grace, and I predestined you to eternal damnation. I'm weeping now, not for you, because I've hated you from the beginning. Rather, I'm weeping for no good reason. Perhaps I'm weeping for Myself, an unrighteous hypocrite, because I expect people to do what they can't do and I command people to do what I don't practice Myself." The Calvinist, who claims he is zealous for God's glory, makes God into an immoral, repugnant monster.

Jesus also rebuked the religious Jews, saying, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and *you* are *unwilling* to come to Me, that you may have life" (John 5:39-40, emphasis added). Clearly, Jesus believed that people had the capacity to choose to repent or not. This cannot be denied by any honest reader of Scripture.

Does Being Dead in Sin Make Repentance Impossible?

But how can one who is "dead in his sins" possibly repent and believe? some Calvinists ask. Isn't it true that dead people can do nothing and are unable to respond to outside influences?

Such logic, however, is seriously flawed, because it forces more meaning into the expression, "dead in your trespasses and sins" than was obviously meant by the apostle Paul. Using such logic, we could just as well conclude that those who are dead in their sins cannot think, breath, speak or hope, since dead people can't do those things either. Like all metaphors, there are similarities that can be drawn between physical and spiritual death, but, like all metaphors, there comes a point where similarities turn to dissimilarities.

Paul's phrase, "dead in your trespasses and sins" expresses the fact that unregenerate man has no relationship with God because of his sins and is void of spiritual life in Christ as well as eternal life. It does not express the idea of man being incapable of making a choice to repent, just as it obviously does not imply man's inability to make any other choice, including moral choices. Unregenerate people have the capacity to choose between doing what God commands or *not* doing what God commands (irrespective of their motives for doing either), and this is quite obvious, because unregenerate people make choices all the time to obey or disobey their own God-given consciences (see Rom. 2:14-15). They are not so evil that they are incapable of choosing to obey, for example, one of God's commandments. Sometimes unregenerate people even stop practicing certain sins while they continue in others, such as when the adulterer ends his affair because of his overwhelming guilt, or when the thief stops stealing for fear of being caught. So what is the difference between any other moral choice that an unregenerate person makes and the moral choice to repent and follow Jesus?

It is obvious from *scores* of scriptures that Paul did not believe that people who are dead in their trespasses and sins are incapable of submitting to God. From the time of Paul's conversion, Jesus made it clear to him that unregenerate people have the capacity *and* responsibility to turn from their sins. We read in Acts 26:16-20 Paul's narration before King Agrippa of his own conversion and calling, when Jesus said to him:

But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that *they may turn* from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in *order that* they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me (Acts 26:16-18, emphasis added).

Paul continued:

Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that *they should repent and turn to God*, performing deeds appropriate to repentance (Acts 26:19-20, emphasis added).

But are non-Calvinists saying that a sinful person can repent and believe apart from God's gracious assistance? Any who do are in error. God graciously attempts to get the attention of the unregenerate man, speaking to Him through His creation (see Rom. 1:18-20), His providence (see Acts 14:17), and each person's conscience (see Rom. 2:14-16). By His Spirit and by His grace, God calls and anoints messengers who take the message of His saving grace to the sinner. By His Spirit and grace, God warns and convicts every sinner of sin, righteousness and judgment (see John 16:8). All of this God does by His grace in order that the sinner might be saved, and He does it all before the sinner has taken a single step towards repentance! Without God's prevenient grace, certainly no person would ever repent. Jesus is, as He declared, "draw[ing] *all* men to [Himself]" (John 12:32, emphasis added) since He has been lifted up from the earth by crucifixion. And as Jesus also declared, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44a). The Calvinist, ignoring the testimony of so much of Scripture that declares God's universal love, His universal atonement, and His universal call to salvation, wrongly concludes that the Father is only drawing *some*, but not *all*, to Jesus. Yet Jesus plainly stated that He would draw *all* men to Himself. *This fact cannot be denied by any honest reader of Scripture.*

Note, however, that although Jesus is drawing all men to Himself, not all men are saved. This again proves that man has something to do with his salvation. He must yield to God's drawing.

John 6:64-65

Another similar Calvinistic misinterpretation revolves around Jesus' words in John 6:64-65. We read Jesus saying, "But there are some of you who do not believe."

John then interjects: "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him." John then continues his narrative: "And He [Jesus] was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.'"

Disregarding the greater context of John 6:41-71 as well of scores of other scriptures that reveal God's desire for all people to come to Jesus (e.g., Matt. 11:28; 16:25; 22:9; Mark 16:15; Luke 9:23; John 3:16-17; 5:34-40; 7:37; 12:47; Acts 17:30; 1 Tim 2:3-6; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 John 4:14), Calvinists conclude that Jesus' statement, "No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father" proves that God sovereignly chooses only some to be saved.

This interpretation, however, stands in contradiction to so many other plain scriptures that declare God's love for all, Jesus' death for all, and God's desire that all be saved. Since inspired Scripture can't contradict itself, we must find an interpretation that harmonizes rather than contradicts the rest of Scripture.

When Jesus said, "There are some of you who do not believe," it wasn't the first time He mentioned believing in John's sixth chapter. Jesus spoke in 6:28-29, 35-36, 40, 47 of believing in Him, and He spoke of it in such a way that anyone who reads what He said without a preconceived bias would conclude that believing in Him was something anyone *could* do, and something that God desires every person *to* do.

Thus, in 6:64, Jesus indicts some of His audience for not believing, just as He did to the crowd in 6:36. Clearly, believing is something *they* were supposed to do, not something that God did for them. Jesus said, "Some of *you* do not *believe*." Those words strongly affirm the non-Calvinist view of human responsibility in salvation.

John then explains that Jesus possessed foreknowledge of those who would not believe, which of course is no surprise. Non-Calvinists maintain (and rightly so) that God knew before the foundation of the world who would and who would not believe in Jesus. John is only endorsing that truth, again affirming the non-Calvinist view. And John again supports the non-Calvinist view that each individual is held responsible to believe. Notice that John said, "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who *did not* [not *could not*] believe, and who it was that *would* [not *had no choice but to*] betray Him" (6:64).

Finally, John quotes Jesus as saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted from the Father" (6:65). Contextually, Jesus must mean that God grants that people can come to Jesus only by believing, and that is in perfect harmony with what Jesus said in the two preceding verses, the entire context of 6:26-71, and the whole of Scripture.

Calvinists also use this portion of Scripture to support the theory that the reason Judas betrayed Jesus is because salvation was not granted to Judas. This, of course, makes God the real betrayer of His Son Jesus, as it eliminates Judas' responsibility in the matter. To the Calvinist, Judas had no choice but to betray Jesus—He was acting out his predetermined destiny. But if this were true, why would Jesus pronounce woe upon Judas for what he did, clearly holding him responsible for his treacherous act? If Judas had no choice but to betray Jesus because God didn't grant him salvation, why would Jesus say, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:24). How could Jesus rightly hold Judas responsible for his actions if he really had no free choice in the matter? To the Calvinist, it was actually God the Father who betrayed Jesus, and Judas was just a tool in God's hand. Thus Jesus should have said, "Woe to My Father for betraying Me!"

God Granting Repentance

But what about the biblical statements that indicate that God *grants* repentance? For example, Peter proclaimed of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, *to grant repentance* to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

There are only two possible interpretations that can be made from Peter’s statement. Either God was sovereignly giving *each and every* totally-depraved, unable-to-repent Israelite the ability and the will to repent by His irresistible grace (note that Peter said that Jesus granted repentance to *Israel*, not *some Israelites*), or God was granting all Israel, individually and corporately, the opportunity to repent, as well as His gracious help in their repentance.

If the first interpretation is correct, then every Israelite would have been saved, because, as already noted, God granted repentance to *Israel*, that is, the whole nation, and not certain individual Israelites. If Calvinists apply their doctrine to this scripture, they would have to conclude that God was bestowing His irresistible grace upon *every* Israelite. Of course, all Israel was not saved, thus proving that the first interpretation is incorrect.

This leaves us with only the second interpretation remaining, and it is the only one that makes sense and harmonizes with the rest of Scripture. Because God has given man free will, man has a part (albeit a very small part compared with God’s part) in his own salvation. He must cooperate with God if he is to be saved. God takes the initiative, loves the sinner, dies for him, draws and convicts him by His creation, His providence and Spirit, sends messengers to him, sometimes performs miracles before him, offers him salvation, and gives him the opportunity to repent and believe. If the man yields to all this influence, believing the gospel and humbling his proud heart, God’s grace continues to work, graciously helping him to repent by the Holy Spirit’s power, just as He helps the man all the rest of his Christian life to obey God. Both God and man play a part in man’s repentance and ongoing sanctification.

Peter, of course, did not believe when he said that Jesus has “granted repentance to Israel,” that man’s free will played no part in his salvation. He would later write, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, *not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*” (2 Pet. 3:9, emphasis added). Clearly, Peter believed that God wants everyone to repent, but just as clearly, not all do, because *they play a part in their repentance*. On the other hand, we must never neglect to say that there is no man who could repent apart from God’s grace. We must have His help to come to the light, repent and believe. Piper cites John 3:20-21 as proof that those who come to the light are those in whom God does His work. I agree. No man will come to the light unless God works in him. Piper, however, elevates scriptures such as John 3:20-21 that highlight God’s part in man’s salvation, and does not acknowledge the many scriptures that would serve to balance his position, those that emphasize man’s part in his salvation. Salvation occurs when man does not abort God’s plan for him, but cooperates with God, who sent his son to be the “true light which, coming into the world, enlightens *every man*” (John 1:9, emphasis added). Why doesn’t Piper mention that verse?

When Peter reported to the Jerusalem elders that Gentiles had been saved and God had poured His Holy Spirit upon them, they acknowledged, “Well then, God has *granted* to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18, emphasis added). They were amazed that God was granting salvation to sinful Gentiles.

Again, according to the Jerusalem elders, God granted repentance to “the Gentiles,” that is, all the Gentiles, not just some pre-selected individuals. Thus, we’ve now learned from Scripture that God has granted repentance to *Israel* (see Acts 5:31) and the *Gentiles* (see Acts 11:18). That includes everyone. Since not all Israelites and Gentiles have repented, we can safely conclude that God’s granting them repentance does not mean that man plays no part in his repentance, which is also obvious from scores of other scriptures. Piper neglects to mention the scores of other scriptures that help us understand man’s obvious part in repentance, and quotes only one scripture (2 Tim 2:24-26) that he misuses to buttress Calvinism’s lop-sided view.

Let us consider that one scripture about repentance that Piper mentions. Paul wrote,

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if *perhaps God may grant them repentance* leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24-26, emphasis added).

Again, Paul couldn’t have been saying that man plays no part in his repentance and that repentance is a sovereign gift of God, otherwise he would have been contradicting so much of what he himself wrote. For example, Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:3-4: “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (emphasis added).

So if we are to harmonize Paul with Paul, we must conclude that he was emphasizing God’s part in man’s repentance. No one can repent without God’s help, because unregenerate man is a slave to sin (see Rom. 6:6). God wants *all* to repent. He is granting every person the opportunity to repent. And He is offering the ability to repent to all who humble themselves. “God...gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6). He, not they, is the one who frees them from their slavery to sin. And that is more likely to happen if the Lord’s bond-servants are kind and gentle to their opponents, as their kindness has a softening affect on their opponents’ hearts.

Again, if God was sovereignly granting repentance apart from man’s willingness, what is the point of Paul’s admonition to the believers to be kind and gentle to their opponents? If God is sovereignly granting repentance, it makes no difference if the believers are kind and gentle to their opponents! But because God is not sovereignly granting repentance, believers’ actions can make the difference in an unbeliever’s receptivity to the freedom from sin that God is offering them. (Incidentally, why didn’t John Calvin follow Paul’s instruction to be kind and gentle to one’s opponents when he had Michael Servetus slowly burnt at the stake for doctrinal differences?)

In the Calvinistic interpretation of scriptures like those just mentioned, we can see the primary flaw in their methods of interpretation, that of ignoring context. Calvinists focus on certain “supportive” scriptures and ignore those that clearly contradict their interpretation of the “supportive” ones. Thus, their interpretation does not harmonize with

the whole of Scripture. They have emphasized God's sovereignty to the extreme, to the point of excluding what Scripture says about man's responsibility and God-given free will. Calvinists dive into a haystack to find a needle, and when they are pricked by something sharp, they exclaim, "This isn't a stack of hay, it's a stack of needles, just as I suspected!"

The Mind Set on the Flesh Cannot Submit to God

By ignoring context, Calvinists misinterpret many scriptures. For example, Piper cites Romans 8:7 to support the Calvinistic ideas of unregenerate man's complete inability to repent and his need of God's *irresistible* grace. In Romans 8:7 Paul writes, "Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, *for it is not even able to do so*" (emphasis added). Piper points to this scripture as proof that unregenerate people are not able to submit to God's law. Thus they are totally depraved and in need of God's irresistible grace if they are to be saved.

But is this one verse the only verse in Scripture that explains anything about the state of unregenerate man? Does this one sentence in Romans 8 nullify or supercede everything else the Bible says about salvation? Was Paul a fool who contradicted his own teaching earlier in the book of Romans (e.g. Rom. 2:14-15)? No! Thus, we must interpret this one verse so that it harmonizes with everything else the Bible says. And that is quite easy to do. Paul is simply saying in Romans 8:7 that a mind that is "set on the flesh," which is a "hostile" mind, does not submit to God and cannot submit to God. But does this prove that one can't, with God's gracious help, soften his hostile mind, yield to God's call, and repent of setting his mind on the flesh? No, it does not. All of Scripture leads us to believe that such a thing is quite possible.

In the very next verse we read, "And those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God (Rom. 8:8, emphasis added). Does this verse prove that it is impossible for one to repent, no longer be "in the flesh" but be "in the Spirit"? Obviously not.

Moreover, did Paul write what he wrote in Romans 8:7 to prove the truth of man's total depravity and his need for God's irresistible grace? No, he was writing to Christians to describe the difference between them and nonbelievers (see 8:4-11), to help them understand their obligation to put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit, and to warn them against "living according to the flesh" lest they die (see 8:12-14). Again we see the classic error of the Calvinist who ignores context.

Calvinism's Inconsistency

Piper contradicts his own theology at one point, when, after elaborating on man's total depravity and complete inability to submit to God, he states. "If we think of ourselves as basically good or even less than totally at odds with God, our grasp of the work of God in redemption will be defective. But *if we will humble ourselves* under this terrible truth of our total depravity..." (p. 8, prgh. 1, emphasis added). Surely, Piper is not speaking here to people who have been regenerated and indwelt by God's Spirit, who are forgiven, clothed in Christ's righteousness and set free from sin's dominion! Those kinds of people are not *totally* depraved! Every Calvinist admits that regenerate people *can* make the choice to obey God, thus no regenerate person can be considered to be *totally* depraved

by Calvinistic terms and definitions. Thus, Piper is speaking to the unregenerate at this point, those whom he says are totally depraved and will always use their freedom to resist God (see p. 9, prgh. 6) since, of course, they have no capacity to do otherwise. Yet he counsels these depraved people to humble themselves, something that is *impossible* for them to do apart from God's sovereign choice to show them His irresistible grace! Like all other Calvinists, Piper finds it very difficult to remain consistent with his own conclusions.

There is no better illustration of Calvinistic contradiction than at the end of his booklet, where Piper complementarily quotes renowned Reformed theologian J.I. Packer, who attempts to explain what a person must do who desires to be saved. We would expect Packer to say that one can do absolutely *nothing* to be saved, since salvation is supposedly all the work of God and none of man. The very question, "What must I do to be saved?" reveals that the inquirer, according to the Calvinist, doesn't understand that salvation is the sovereign work of God. The consistent Calvinist must tell such an inquirer, "You can't do anything! If God has pre-selected you, He will change your will by His irresistible grace, regenerate you, and give you the gift of repentance and faith. Your very question is presumptuous and reveals your pride. But you can do nothing about your sin of pride, because you are totally depraved, and will only use your freedom to resist God! In fact (according to page 6 in Piper's booklet) you are so totally depraved that any attempts you make at repentance are actually evil in God's eyes, because everything you do is a sin."

Keep in mind that Piper has already declared that God first sovereignly regenerates the sinner, who then immediately receives Christ. According to the Calvinist, one doesn't believe in Christ and then God regenerates him; God regenerates him and then he believes, because he had no capacity to believe as one dead in his sins. Says Piper,

We believe that new birth is a miraculous creation of God that enables a formerly "dead" person to receive Christ and so be saved. We do not think that faith precedes and causes new birth. Faith is the evidence that God has begotten us anew....The two acts (regeneration and faith) are so closely connected that in experience we cannot distinguish them. God begets us anew and the first glimmer of life in the newborn child is faith. This new birth is the effect of irresistible grace, because it is an act of sovereign creation" (p. 11, prgh. 7, p. 12, prgh. 1, emphasis added).

And so I must then ask, who is this person who is asking, "What must I do to be saved?" He must be unregenerate, as he is confessing that he does not believe he is saved, indicating that God has not regenerated him nor given him the gift of faith. As an unregenerate person, he is either predestined to be sovereignly changed by God's irresistible grace or he is not predestined to be changed. (We will later consider the Calvinistic doctrine of Unconditional Election.) If he is not predestined to be sovereignly changed, then there is nothing he can do to be saved because he will never be saved. He has no chance of ever being saved.

If he is predestined to be sovereignly changed, either God is currently showing him his irresistible grace, or God is not. If God is currently showing him His *irresistible* grace, then he *can't* resist for a moment and so he must now be regenerate; but he can't be regenerate because he is confessing that he does not believe that he is saved, indicating

that God has not regenerated him and given him the gift of faith. Thus we can be certain that God is not currently, at that moment, changing him by His irresistible grace, and if he is to ever be regenerated, he must wait until God does show him His irresistible grace.

So we have left only two possibilities: Either the man is predestined to be changed by God's grace at some point in the future or he is not. Currently, though, there is nothing he can do but continue to sin (he's totally depraved), wait, and hope (which, of course, he does not, will not, and cannot do, since he is totally depraved). To tell the man to believe in Jesus is absurd, because he can't do that until after he is regenerate, according to Calvinists. (Yet that is what Paul told the Philippian jailer to do in order to be saved, because Paul believed in Jesus' plan and method of salvation rather than Calvin's.)

Now, read how Calvinistic theologian, J.I. Packer, answers the person who asks, "What must I do to be saved?" My comments are contained within brackets.

To the question: what must I do to be saved? The old gospel (Calvinism) replies: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. [Yet why would Packer tell a person who is obviously unregenerate to do something *he* can't possibly do?] To the further question: what does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? its reply is: it means knowing oneself to be a sinner, and Christ to have died for sinners; abandoning all self-righteousness and self-confidence, and casting oneself wholly upon Him for pardon and peace; and exchanging one's natural enmity and rebellion against God for a spirit of grateful submission to the will of Christ through the renewing of one's heart by the Holy Ghost. [Note: Did the Philippian jailer know and do all this in order to be saved?]

So, to believe in Christ to be saved, I must, among other things, abandon all self-righteousness and self-confidence and exchange my natural enmity and rebellion against God for a spirit of grateful submission. Yet, according to the Calvinist, I can do none of these things unless God first regenerates me! And if He regenerates me, he also gives me faith in Christ! If I have faith in Christ, I don't need to be saved! So why is Packer telling me that *I* must do these things "through the renewing of [my] heart by the Holy Ghost"? If my heart is renewed through the Holy Ghost, I'll automatically do those things, because God has sovereignly changed me. I'm saved! I don't need *to be* saved!

Packer, no doubt, is aware of his inconsistency and the problem he is creating. But in an attempt to dig himself out of his inconsistency, he only digs himself deeper. He continues:

And to the further question still: how am I to go about believing and repenting, if I have no natural ability to do these things? [**Great** question!] It [Calvinism] answers: look to Christ, speak to Christ, cry to Christ, just as you are [a depraved person who would never and could never look, speak or cry out to Christ, who can't submit to God, and whom God is obviously not currently giving His irresistible grace, otherwise you would already be regenerate]; confess your sin, your impenitence, your unbelief, and cast yourself on His mercy; ask Him to give you a new heart, working in you [what you obviously don't have yet:] true repentance and firm faith; [Yet all of these things the Calvinist says it is impossible for you to do as a totally depraved person until you are regenerated by God's irresistible grace! And Packer doesn't stop

contradicting his own theology! He continues:] ask Him to take away your evil heart of unbelief and to write His law within you, that you may never henceforth stray from Him [How could one who is predestined before time and regenerated by God's sovereign choice ever turn away from God?]. Turn [!!!!] to Him and trust Him [!!!!] as best you [!!!!] can [but *you can't!*], and pray for grace to turn and trust more thoroughly; use the means of grace expectantly, looking to Christ to draw near to you as you seek to draw near to Him [Now *there's* a scripture that emphasizes man's part in salvation—Jas. 4:8—yet Packer interestingly reverses the order of it and adds the word “seek,” a pathetic attempt to make Scripture a little more acceptable to his theology, because he knows that totally depraved people *can't* “draw near to God”]; watch, pray, read and hear God's Word, worship and commune with God's people, and so continue till you know in yourself beyond doubt that you are indeed a changed being [When did *that* happen?], a penitent believer, and the new heart which you desired [Amazing! A totally depraved person wanted all those things and a new heart before God sovereignly gave it to him against his will!] has been put within you.

Packer's advice to the one who is sincerely seeking salvation repeatedly contradicts his own theology. In fact, according to his own theology, there are no unregenerate people sincerely seeking to know how to be saved, because people are totally depraved and use their freedom only to resist God and do evil. Packer would have been more consistent with his theology if he had answered the question, “What must I do to be saved?” by saying, “You can't be sincere in asking that!”

Not only is Packer's advice to salvation seekers inconsistent with his own theology, it is also potentially very dangerous to one's spiritual health. Let us say that a sincere seeker takes Packer's advice and follows his list of things he must do to find salvation. Let us also say that after he does all those things that he feels he is saved. *On what does his faith rest?* His faith cannot rest on any of God's promises, because, to the Calvinist, there is no promise of salvation that any individual may claim, because it is only God's will for some to be saved, and the names of those people are not listed in the Bible. Thus the only real basis for his faith can be what he has done and is doing. His faith thus rests in his works, not in Christ, something Scripture repeatedly warns against.

The non-Calvinist, in contrast, can take Jesus at His word, who said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). He can cry out in faith, “Lord Jesus, I believe in You, and so according to your promise to everyone (that includes me), I have eternal life by faith!” His works will immediately validate his faith in Christ. While the non-Calvinist believer is rejoicing in the gift of His salvation and manifesting the Spirit's fruit, the Calvinist is still wondering if he is one of the chosen ones, and is looking at his works to try to convince himself that he is.

God Opens Hearts

Rather than allowing scripture to balance scripture, Calvinists consistently focus on scriptures that emphasize God's part in salvation and consistently ignore those that focus on man's part. They thus conclude that salvation is all the work of God and that man has no responsibility in the matter. For example, Piper points to Acts 16:14, where we read

about Lydia listening to the preaching of Paul: “And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”

“See!” the Calvinist exclaims. “*God* opened Lydia’s heart! That is just another way of saying that God showed Lydia His irresistible grace!”

Because such an interpretation stands in absolute contradiction to what thousands of scriptures say about God and salvation, the one who wants to harmonize Acts 16:14 with the rest of the Bible comes up with a better interpretation: Luke is simply emphasizing God’s part in salvation. God succeeded in doing to Lydia’s heart what He desires to do in everyone’s heart. The reason He succeeded in Lydia’s heart is because *she*, unlike some others, first submitted to listen to Paul’s preaching, and then yielded to the Holy Spirit’s conviction and drawing. Lydia (the supposedly totally-depraved “worshiper of God”) believed. Over the years, I’ve watched numerous people “open the hearts” of even their adversaries by various means, but I never thought that they did it without their adversaries’ consent!

In the *very same chapter* in Acts, Luke clearly reveals that man has a part to play in his salvation. When the Philippian jailer asked what he must do to be saved (see Acts 16:30), Paul didn’t respond, “*You* can’t do anything! You may only be saved if it is God’s preordained will, and if it is, He will show you His irresistible grace and you will be regenerated and given faith!” Rather, Paul told the jailer, “*Believe* [something *you* must do] in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

Paul could make this promise to the jailer and his entire household, because Paul knew that salvation was open to anyone who would believe in the Lord Jesus. Paul then “spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house” (Acts 16:32), because “faith comes by hearing” (Rom 10:17). They all believed, were saved and received baptism.

Here is how a Calvinist must understand the salvation of the Philippian jailer: When the jailer asked what he must do to be saved, he was obviously not yet under the influence of God’s irresistible grace, or else he would already have been regenerate and would have already received the sovereign gifts of faith and repentance. Thus he was still totally depraved, always using his freedom to resist God. (That being so, we must wonder why a totally depraved person is sincerely asking what he must do to be saved. If the Calvinist says it is because this totally depraved person is under conviction from God, it must be that God is bestowing “resistible grace” rather than “irresistible grace.” Yet the totally depraved sinner, according to Piper, will always use his freedom to resist God, so he would never sincerely seek to be saved. This jailer, however, was obviously sincerely seeking.)

When Paul told the jailer to believe in the Lord Jesus and he would be saved along with his household, Paul didn’t know if the jailer was predestined to be saved or not, and so he must have been thinking to himself, “I hope this guy is one of the predestined ones and that God is just about to bestow His irresistible grace upon him, because what I’ve just told him to do is absolutely impossible for him to do. I’ve actually deceived him, giving him a false hope if he’s not predestined to be saved. I also hope that all the members of his household are predestined to be saved and that God is about to bestow His irresistible grace on them as well, otherwise I’ve deceived the jailer about them also. Perhaps I should have just told him the truth about his total depravity and God’s

irresistible grace.” How could any consistent and thoughtful Calvinist tell people that they will be saved if they believe in the Lord Jesus without having such thoughts go through his mind?

The book of Acts is full of indications that man plays a part in his salvation (e.g., Acts 2:37-41; 3:19-26; 7:51; 8:6-14, 22-23, 36-37; 9:35, 42; 10:34-35, 43; 11:21; 13:8-13, 38-41, 46-47; 14:1, 15:19; 16:30-34; 17:2-4, 11-12, 17, 30-31; 18:4-8, 19, 27-28; 19:8-9, 18; 20:21, 22:18, 26:17-20, 28:23-24). It is also full of indications that God is *very* active in trying to get people to respond to His love. Thus, once again, we see the primary error of the Calvinists. They focus on those scriptures that seem to support their doctrines, and ignore those that stand in direct contradiction, thus failing to harmonize scripture with scripture.

An example: Because Acts 2:47 says, “The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved,” should we rightly conclude, from that *single* verse, that God is the only one who plays a part in the salvation of people and that man plays no part because that verse only speaks of God doing something? Or could we rightly conclude that no one *repented* or *believed* the gospel, because that single verse *doesn't say* anyone did those things? Could we rightly conclude that no one *preached* the gospel to those the Lord added to the church, because that one verse *says nothing* about anyone preaching? No intelligent Calvinist would make such conclusions! Yet that is precisely what Calvinists are doing with verses such as Acts 16:14, where we read that the Lord opened Lydia's heart. Searching for the needle in the haystack, they are pricked by something sharp, and thus conclude the whole stack is not hay, but needles.

Satan Blinds the Minds of Unbelievers

Piper also cites 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 to support the Calvinistic idea of God's irresistible grace. There Paul writes,

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Does this passage prove that God only shines His light into the darkened hearts of certain ones whom He shows His irresistible grace? No, it does not, except to one who has a preconceived bias and is looking for verses to support his bias. This passage highlights Satan's part in keeping people in his clutches and God's part in releasing them from Satan's clutches. It does not emphasize man's part in that process of being freed from Satan. *This passage is not everything the Bible has to say on the subject of salvation!*

Certainly no Calvinist would conclude from this passage that the *only* reason unregenerate people perish is because Satan blinds them through no fault of their own! Rather, the Calvinist would be quick to say that there is more to it than that—thethat-the

unsaved man is totally depraved and always uses his freedom to resist God. Thus, this passage doesn't explain *everything* about why man is sinful, and neither does it explain *everything* about how man is freed from his sins. Rather, this passage focuses on Satan's influence and God's influence on unregenerate man. God's truth can break through Satan's lies that are believed in the hearts of unregenerate man.

I would also maintain that something of man's responsibility is implied in this passage, as Paul refers to the "perishing" as the "unbelieving." Unbelieving people are people who don't believe, and believing is something that Scripture repeatedly says is man's responsibility. In fact, everybody, regenerate and unregenerate, believes. The unregenerate believe Satan's lies and can thus be said to be blinded by Satan, and the regenerate believe God's truth and are thus no longer blinded by Satan. Additionally, scores of scriptures, such as the most well known verse in the Bible—John 3:16, tell us that the reason people perish is because they don't believe.

Second, Paul refers to Satan as "the god of this world." Satan is "the god of this world" because he is the one whom the world has chosen to serve. But when *they* (to borrow Jesus' exact words) "turn...from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18), Jesus then becomes their Lord and Satan is no longer their Master. God frees them from Satan's power.

2 Corinthians 4:6 does not prove that God sovereignly shines His light into the hearts of those He has pre-selected for salvation, and that He does not shine it into the hearts of those He has pre-selected for damnation. It simply says that God has shone His light into our hearts, contrasting that with Satan who had previously blinded our minds with his lies. To extract the Calvinistic concept of irresistible grace from this particular passage is to force more meaning into the passage than is actually there, and to pry out an interpretation that doesn't harmonize with the rest of Scripture. Moreover, if God sovereignly preordains who will and who will not be saved, this passage creates more problems for Calvinists than they want to handle. The reason is because they can only then conclude that God is the true force behind Satanic deception that blinds unbelievers, and that Satan is not the enemy of God but actually His obedient helper.

Does the New Birth Precede Faith?

Piper connects irresistible grace with the new birth on page 11 of his booklet, and states that God sovereignly regenerates us, which results in our having faith. The only scriptural support he offers for this view is 1 John 5:1, which he quotes from the *Revised Standard Version*: "Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." Piper's argument is that John's words, "has been," indicate that faith in Jesus is the evidence that one "has been," prior to his having faith, born again.

This is pathetic exegesis. John is not revealing that the new birth precedes faith, but is simply describing one result of faith in Jesus.

John's clear purpose in writing this verse was not to establish the order of the process of salvation, but to state one of the main points of the theme of his entire first epistle, which is "the evidence of the true Christian." John repeatedly lists three tests that one must pass in order to validate his authentic relationship with God: (1) he must love the brethren, (2) he must keep Christ's commandments, and (3) he must believe that Jesus is the Christ. In the verse under consideration (1 John 5:1), John touches on the third test,

just as he does in other places in his epistle (see 1 John 2:18-27; 4:1-6, 14-15; 5:5, 10, 13).

Clearly, John did not believe that regeneration precedes faith. He wrote at the close of his Gospel: “But these have been written *that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and *that believing you may have life* in His name (John 20:31, emphasis added). Neither did Jesus believe that regeneration preceded faith: “While you have the light, *believe* in the light, *in order that you may become sons of light*” (John 12:36, emphasis added). Neither did Paul: “For you are all sons of God *through* faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26, emphasis added).

Incidentally, the NASB translation of 1 John 5:1 does not contain the past tense upon which Piper’s interpretation rests: “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ *is* [not *has been*] born of God.” Piper’s interpretation of 1 John 5:1 is another imaginary needle in the haystack.

On this same subject, Piper attempts to explain away the obvious contradiction between his doctrine of the new birth preceding faith and John 1:12-13, which states, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Reading these words without a Calvinistic lens, any normal reader would think they meant that anyone could receive Christ by believing in His name, and as many as do, God gives them the right to become His children. (Thus, believing in Christ comes before regeneration.) This regeneration is not a physical birth, and it doesn’t happen because man willed it, but because God wills it. Obviously, no person could cause himself to be spiritually reborn. But God will regenerate anyone who believes in Jesus and make that person His child.

In his explanation of these two verses, Piper contradicts himself as well as John when he writes: “In other words, it is necessary to receive Christ [note his next words] *in order to become* a child of God [that means one receives Christ *before* he becomes a child of God, and receiving Christ is a condition that must first be met], but the birth that brings one into the family of God is not possible by the will of man. Man is dead in trespasses and sins. He cannot make himself new, or create new life in himself. He must be born of God. *Then, with the new nature of God, he immediately receives Christ*” (emphasis added). This directly contradicts what Piper has just said a few sentences ago, and what John actually wrote.

In conclusion, under the scrutiny of Scripture, the Calvinistic ideas of total depravity and irresistible grace are found to add to and contradict the revelation found in the Bible. These particular Calvinistic doctrines nullify Scripture’s clear teaching regarding man’s free will and his responsibility to respond to the gospel and cooperate with God. They make human beings into robots who are incapable of making moral choices and who have no capacity to love. They make Christians to be people whom God forced against their wills to become His children. They make the preaching of the gospel senseless, and make liars out of all gospel preachers who lead people to believe that they have a choice to make. They make meaningless Christ’s and His apostles’ appeals to repent and the hundreds of scriptures that state that people have the ability to do so. They make God an unjust judge who condemns people for doing what they are incapable of not doing. They also make Him into a confused mad man who works against Himself yet cooperates with Satan, and a hate-filled hypocrite who condemns others for what He is guilty of Himself.

Moreover, they make Him responsible for the damnation of billions and ultimately responsible for all the suffering in the world, since only He can stop sin but He chooses not to regenerate billions of sinners.

Finally, Calvinists are not able to live consistently with their own doctrine, as they preach a deceptive Arminian gospel if they preach any gospel at all. They must lie (according to their beliefs of what the truth is) to anyone who asks them, "What must I do to be saved?" as J. I. Packer's advice to sincere seekers revealed. All of this is done at the expense of Scripture, upon which they force their interpretations and twist, to the end that millions of people are currently deceived by their doctrine. How many people have given up hope of salvation because of Calvinistic teaching, thinking that they are not among the elect since they have felt no irresistible grace? Dear Calvinist, the blood of such people is on your hands.